

ARCHITECTURAL PROGRESS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE annual report of the council, about to be distributed to the members of the Royal Institute of Architects, contains the following interesting *resumé* of architectural proceedings during the past year:—

"On the Continent, our honorary and corresponding members have afforded striking evidences of their abilities by the completion of some fine works. The church of St. Vincent de Paul, at Paris, by M. Hittorff, has just been opened for divine worship.* He has, with much ingenuity, adopted various means of producing effects, by the introduction of coloured decorations in enamelled plates, and this example is rendered the more valuable by the publication by that gentleman, in a pamphlet, of the principles which have guided him in this conception. Our friend, Herr Zanth, of Stuttgart (the colleague of M. Hittorff in the valuable work on the Monuments of Sicily), has just completed an edifice in the Moresque style for the King of Wurtemberg, which has been noticed in the foreign journals as highly successful.

The French have also completed some remarkable works of architecture, which the energy, taste, and liberality of their ancestors had begun. The Hotel de Ville, at Paris, a work of the 16th century, has for many years been in a course of enlargement and completion. The exterior is now entire, and the interior is in progress with all the richness of embellishment of which the "Renaissance" affords such splendid examples, and to the production of which the genius of its architect, M. Serrure, is fully equal. This edifice is now the worthy municipal palace of the French capital, little, if at all, inferior in grandeur of arrangement and decoration to that of the sovereign. The Prefect of the Department of the Seine, in carrying out this fine conception, has felt and acted as the chief of not merely a locality, but of a powerful, an enlightened, and an art-loving community. Our own metropolis has also, within the last twelve months, been improved by various public works, of which some are completed, and some still in progress. The new Royal Exchange, with its accessories, forms an imposing feature of the city; the completion of Trafalgar square, with its terraces, flight of steps, fountains, basins, and triumphal column, shews that a feeling has arisen in the public mind for rich and effective combinations of objects of a monumental character. The thoroughfare near Leicester-square, those from Oxford-street to Holborn, and from Long-acre, northward, and that near White-chapel, with the lines of lofty houses in progress, already add considerably to the appearance of the Metropolis, and cannot but contribute essentially to its greater comfort and healthiness. The street architecture of Paris is on a scale of more grandeur than ours, and the facility of employing a cheap stone affords the French architect greater scope for his fancy and the opportunity of giving the houses a more imposing character than brick is capable of producing. It cannot, however, be denied that, notwithstanding the disadvantages imposed upon it, not only by the inferiority of our materials, but likewise by our domestic habits, the street architecture of London has of late years assumed a new and more important character.

Within a few days the Conservative Club-House, the production of two of our fellows, has been opened. It is another evidence of the increasing importance of architecture, and gains additional interest as a work of art, by the bold application of polychromatic embellishment judiciously and fearlessly introduced throughout its principal apartments, important as tending to improve the taste of many, who may, in their own residences, carry out the art of embellishment to its full development.

The progress made in the arrangements for improving, at least partially, the banks of the river Thames, may lead us to hope that the construction of a line of public quays in the heart of the metropolis, will, at no distant period, secure to us the advantages in the ornamental, which this simple stream already possesses in a commercial point of view, to a greater degree than that of any other capital in the world.

The important Act for regulating the build-

ings of the metropolis and its environs, passed during the last session of Parliament, came into operation at the beginning of the present year. The object of its framers has evidently been to guard against unsound construction, to prevent as much as possible danger from fire, and to insure a greater degree of healthiness in a class of dwellings hitherto too much neglected. It is to be hoped that similar benefits, modified to suit local exigencies, may be extended to other parts of the country, where too often the humbler classes become the victims of ill-drained and ill-ventilated habitations.

A great movement has lately been made, in regard to providing for the health and amusement of the humbler classes, whose physical and intellectual condition is now occupying a large share of sympathy and attention. In many of the principal manufacturing and commercial towns and cities, liberal subscriptions have been raised for the purchase of plots of ground, and for the formation of public gardens. A society has likewise been formed in London for the erection of public baths and lavatories. We can hardly expect to vie with the ancient Romans in the construction of their *thermæ*; but it is to be hoped that in the erection of the baths of the British metropolis, their frequenters will not be regarded as insensible to the beauties of architecture, and that the art will be employed in aid of utility. Why should not the million have the privilege, in their places of public resort, of refining their taste, and exciting their imagination? why should they be bound down to cold sentiments of mere utility? May they not also unite the agreeable with the useful, and feel that they have minds to be improved, tastes to be cultivated, and sensations to be excited by the contemplation of beauty and harmony, as carried out in the productions of the artist. Let us hope, then, that our public baths may be monuments of art, and an evidence of the taste and intelligence of the present day.

The propositions which have been urged for some time, on the propriety of establishing local museums of art throughout the empire, was made the subject of a paper read at a recent ordinary meeting of the Institute, by Mr. Wilson, director of the Government School of Design. Nothing could contribute more essentially than local museums to local improvement, as exciting attention, habituating the eye to fine form and correct detail, and promoting a comparison between objects good and bad. Thus, the mind, brought to think and to discuss comparative merits, and to investigate the sources of true intellectual enjoyment, must rise to a higher and healthier tone, and be satisfied only with the purer objects of refined taste.

In connection with this subject, it may be observed, that we possess, scattered throughout the country, numerous monuments and monumental effigies of the dynasties which have reigned in England, of the importance and beauty of which we may form some estimate from those in Westminster Abbey. It is to be regretted that they are allowed to fall into ruin, without any attempt on the part of our rulers to establish some general system for their preservation and maintenance. Never at any period have these styles of art been better understood, nor have our artisans ever been so able to restore these monuments faithfully to their ancient splendour.

It is to be remarked, that the Minister of the Interior, in France, has just applied to the Chambers for a grant of about 85,000*l.*, to be applied in the restoration of several historical monuments of that country.

HISTORICAL PAINTING.—PREMIUM ONE THOUSAND POUNDS.—A notice with this heading has been put forth during the present week, and to it are affixed the names of Thomas Bell, Don Alkali Works, South Shields, and Charles Hill Roe, Hermitage, Aston-road, Birmingham. The competition is for an oil painting of the Baptism of Christ, to be not less than 12 feet by 10, nor larger than 15 feet by 12, and two years are allowed for the sending in of the paintings. We know nothing respecting the parties whose names are affixed to the notice, nor of the ultimate purpose for which it is issued, it will therefore be at least discreet on the part of artists to obtain further and more satisfactory information before they risk their time and substance.

NEW BUILDINGS AND IMPROVEMENTS IN EDINBURGH.

SINCE the building of the new town of Edinburgh, there has never been a time so ripe in new buildings as within the last few years. The *Edinburgh Evening Post* gives the following particulars:—

The city, highly picturesque and beautiful before, has received several fine improvements in its appearance. Sir Walter Scott's monument, newly finished, is a grand object, and its great elevation overcomes the disadvantage arising from the somewhat low site on which it is erected. The spire of the Assembly Hall, a charming piece of architecture, is now one of the principal landmarks of the city. The only pity is, that the building is in a neighbourhood which does not at all harmonize with it in any thing, if we except some new edifices in the Elizabethan style, on which the old gloomy houses of other centuries seem to frown displeasure. It is nearly opposite, and down a close too—and that close the abode of poverty—that Mary of Lorraine, the mother of our beautiful but unhappy Mary had her palace and oratory. On the Calton Hill there is being erected a debtors' prison: the building is to the east of the gaol and bridewell, and will be included within the sweep of the same wall. Talking of this wall, we ought to observe that it is built exactly in the style of the battlements of an ancient fortress, and with its abutting watch-towers, harmonises well with the rocky elevation from which, on the south side, it rises. On witnessing the good taste indicated here, one cannot help contrasting it with the gross blockheadism which was unaccountably allowed to perpetrate the new barracks erected in Edinburgh Castle. They remind us of a manufactory or union workhouse, and one could almost wish they would tumble down when the inmates were engaged elsewhere. Additions are being made at the end to the north of the advocates' library. It strikes us that this building has been too much doctored—that it is spoiled and deteriorated by the patchwork addenda which are infixed upon it. A new edifice would have been the preferable, perhaps the cheapest expedient of the learned faculty. The new Physicians' Hall, a fine building on the north of the New Town, is nearly finished. The front will be highly ornamented, and will form a choice acquisition to Queen-street, rather wanting in striking buildings. The Commercial Bank, erected on the site of the former Physicians' Hall, in George-street, is advancing. It will add another attraction to a street already one of the finest in Europe. It appears to be designed in the Italian palace style. Near it some striking improvements have been made in the buildings attended for public companies and banks. Nothing can be finer than the light, graceful, and ornamental fronts which we meet in this locality.

Donaldson's Hospital, to the west of the city, is progressing rapidly. It is a truly grand and noble structure, and nothing could have been more judiciously chosen than the fine elevation which forms its site. We understand that no less a sum than 100,000*l.* is to be expended in getting up the building, and adapting its internal economy to the purpose for which it is extended. A new Heriot's school, situated at the west end of Rose-street, is nearly finished. The "Political Martyr's" monument in the Calton burying-ground is so far advanced, that it can be seen from the North Bridge. Additional erections—stations of railways, and other buildings are soon to be set a-going. And we believe that in addition to the commodious and elegant villas, and other buildings existing at Newington, a large number of houses are to be erected by one of our banks, which has recently obtained the greater part of the ground. A better site for building cannot be imagined, with its delightful southern exposure and salubrious air. It is a peculiar feature of the present era of improvement, that houses in streets occupied by the highest order of gentry who keep mansions in Edinburgh have been converted into shops and business establishments. This is particularly observable in George-street. The stream of rank has a tendency to flow northward in the direction of the back part of the New Town. The shops in several parts of Edinburgh have, in many cases been improved to a high degree of elegance, and, in some cases, decorated with very fine ornaments. One great evil has been removed from the

* See BUILDER, p. 3.